critical digest

VOL. III No. 23 February 5, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Not For Children-Coronet, 2/8/51. Playwrights' Company production of Elmer Rice's new play featuring Betty Field and Elliott Nugent, directed by Mr. Rice...Ti-Coq-Broadhurst, 2/9/51. Fridolin Productions and the Shuberts present English translation of French-Canadian dramatic comedy written, directed and starring Fridolin... Billy Budd-Biltmore, 2/10/51. Chandler Cowles and Anthony B. Farrell present Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman's adaptation of the Herman Melville novel. Directed by Norris Houghton, featuring Dennis King, Charles Nolte and Tarin Thatcher.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on back page

Peer Gynt-ANTA Playhouse-1/28/51. Wide critical differences greeted Paul Green's version of Ibsen classic, starring John Garfield. Five outright "cons" and an equal number of mild, favorable "pros" were recorded for the limited run ANTA subscription production, staged by Lee Strasberg. Critics of Times, Mirror, Journal-American, Post and Eagle panned it as downright boring, though most praised ingenious sets by Donald Oenslager. John Garfield's efforts likewise were viewed from various angles. Dissenters didn't believe he was equal to the part, while several credited him with keeping the play moving through his physical energy. Chapman, News, and Dash, Women's Wear classified production as ANTA's most interesting to date. Former didn't think Green's script was very poetic. Atkinson, Times, doubted if any revival of the Ibsen story was worth while without the Grieg music. Watts, Post, and McClain, Journal-American, admitted this was not their favorite Ibsen dish.

Where's Charley?-Broadway, 1/29/51. Limited run return of Martin and Feuer's first hit received even better notices than it did at the start of its two and a half year run. Daily critics praised score and book by Frank Loesser, lively production by George Abbott, and especially the new business added by star Ray Bolger. Post and Mirror critics, who weren't too enthusiastic in their 1948 reviews, joined the bandwagon. Dash, Women's Wear, urged those who saw the original to take the small fry to this production. Allyn McLerie, of the first cast, shared the compliments. Sylvester, News, didn't think much of the house's amplification system.

D'Oyly Carte Opera Company-St. James, 1/29/51. New York's newspaper reviewers are Gilbert & Sullivan fans. At least they are all out supporters of anything done by the famed British company. All recommended regular attendance at the productions given during the limited four week run, which opened with "The Mikado". Standbys Martyn Green and Darrell Fancourt received their usual praise, with newcomers Margaret Mitchell and Neville Griffiths being welcomed. Atkinson, Times, voiced minor complaint that some of the newcomers were not as articulate as the oldsters. Several noted with pleasure that this company presents the G & S classics in the traditional, unjazzed versions. Chapman, News, filed an interoffice memo to his managing editor recommending that he really shouldn't be paid for the evening's work because he enjoyed himself too much.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Not reading the original novel, short story or poem on which a play is based is not a legitimate excuse from a drama critic..."Free plug" or paid advertisement, the Bond electric sign writer still lists Arms and the Man starring Sam Wanamaker, though show has been closed several weeks...Damon Runyon could have written a wonderful short story based on real life of Carl Ring, paper bag millionaire heir, who is suing Dramatists Guild as a monopoly.

Copyright 1951 by T.M.Kraus, Editor 505 5th Ave., N.Y.17 MU2-0326 $10 Yearly

- -

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

- -

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. World Telegram & Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. Newark News
11. Women's Wear Daily
12. Wall Street Journal
13. Journal of Commerce
14. George Jean Nathan
15. Ward Morehouse
16. Morning Telegraph
17. Variety
18. Billboard
19. Theatre Arts
20. New Leader
21. Freeman
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr.Sci.Monitor
25. Sat.Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30. Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-21-22.

BLESS YOU ALL-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 13 votes. Con: 1-5-10-11-14-15-17-18-22-27-29.

CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-8-12-20-22-25-29. So-So: 14.

THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30.

DARKNESS AT NOON-Booth, 1/13/51. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10. Con: 1. So-So: 5.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27.

GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 28.

THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.

KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 3-11-29. So-So: 17-30.

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 14. So-So: 2-27-30.

OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-23-29-30. Con: 1-3-9-12-17-18-20-22-24-26-27. So-So: 2.

PEEP SHOW-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-9-10-13-15-16-18-23. Con: 1-2-11-14-19-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-12-17.

PETER PAN-St.James, 4/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 7-14-30. So-So: 15-18.

SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.

SECOND THRESHOLD-Morosco, 1/2/51. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-26-30. Con: 4-9-13-17-18-23-27-28.

SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 5-24-28.

- -

Introduce "critical digest" to your friends at no cost:

Name_____ Address_____

City_____ State_____

Subscriber's Name_____ Date_____

- -

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

' Green Room Department '

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

ADD CRITICAL POTSHOTS.."Drama critics appear to be too much impressed with themselves to understand or care about what is good theatre and why the intelligent public attends theatrical performances" complains the Lynchburg, Va. Advance.

"DARKNESS" BEAMS...Billboard offered two suggestions to Playwrights Company, producer of Darkness At Noon. First, that radio and television networks and producers arrive at a mutually satisfactory arrangement for bringing portions or all of the drama to the mass audience. Second, because of its important message at this time the producers allow the non-commercial production of the drama royalty free.

RUMORS...Broadway musical star's backstage spouting has caused producers to tell him to "Hold your soapbox meetings on your own time", whispers Kilgallen, Journal American...Fantastic rumor making Broadway rounds is that ANTA leadership is actually crooked, and had to have a hit such as Twentieth Century to balance the books.

SENTIMENTAL REALISTS...The so-called "realistic" plays of the 30s and 40s weren't very honest, Burr, Playbill, decides. Instead of giving a fair picture, they merely specialized in enlarging the lower strata, while blocking out the top of the scale. Now the other end of the scale has emerged, as it always will in a well balanced theatre.

MINOR PEEVES...So many Broadway shows are being listed for closing than reopening notes Phillips, WT&S, that actors ask one another "Are you serving a sentence putting in a spell under probation or getting a reprieve?"...Lyric-writing is the most overrated of the theatrical skills, insists Cannon, Post.

STUDENT TICKETS...All interested parties must cooperate to insure a steady flow of students into audiences at all times, comments Theatre News Weekly. Some tickets at reduced rates are already being provided. It is a good investment in build-tomorrow's audiences.

CANADIAN TROUBLES...British troupes cannot often include Canada in their North American tours because authors have sold combined American and Canadian rights, points out Morley, Stage. This is why Canadian theatres are prohibited from doing many English plays. In addition a new tax takes 15 per cent of visiting artists weekly salaries.

CRITICS CIRCLE...New York Critics Circle meets April 3 to pick best plays of season. Morehouse, WT&S, predicts Darkness At Noon will win a prize. Critical favorite so far this season is Guys and Dolls, with only one dissenter.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

' Theatre News Round Up '

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

CBS turned down Gloria Swanson TV daytime show...Kap Monahan, Pittsburgh Press, bowed off TV Sho-Biz Quiz...Ashton Stevens, Chicago Herald American, critically ill,.. Frank Farrell takes over Charles Driscoll's syndicated McNaught column...Robert Sylvester, News, has completed first draft of show co-starring Ford model agency partners ...Joan Diener, Season in the Sun, wins Esquire Boot Polish Jan.award for "Polished Performance"...Jimmy Durante and Helen Traubel duet on Victor discs...ANTA Tennis Tourney due February. 16 at Seventh Regiment Armory features Paul Lukas, Jose Ferrer, Elliott Nugent and George Abbott...Guys and Dolls Damon Runyon fund benefit netted $58,300...Producers and directors traded punches with Carl Ring, who is suing Dramatists Guild, at monthly Drama Desk meeting...NBC "Big Show" adapting "Show Train" idea...Seyril Schochen won National Theatre Conference playwrighting fellowship.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

HOWARD LINDSAY...New Dramatists Committee chairman isn't hoping for miracles from his group, he admitted to Theatre News Weekly. If one or two from the group of 30 young writers develops into a professional he feels the project has been a success. Five hundred applications were received last year to join the group which meets with theatre people and sees plays.

NORRIS HOUGHTON...Billy Budd director explained why the Melville story has suddenly become popular, Rice, Post, reports. An Italian opera, an English motion picture and an opera by Benjamin Britten and E.M.Forster are all in the planning stage. The director suspects the problem faced in the story has suddenly become quite contemporary, one of conflicting obligations in the world.

EDGAR STEHLI...The Happy Time actor doesn't think much of premiere audiences, Hawkins, WT&S, discovered. They are over-enthusiastic and under-appreciative. For the first six months you get consistent theatre goers who appreciate subtleties more. Later you get better results from more obvious things.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

Darkness At Noon-Alvin, 1/13/51. Three more weekly appraisers voted for Sidney Kingsley's adaptation of the controversial Koestler novel, produced by Playwrights Company. Shipley, New Leader, viewed it not so much as entertainment, or even a drama; but as a dramatized warning of a grim world. Brown, SRL, felt that some of the literary qualities of the novel had been mislaid, but that Kingsley had succeeded in turning a fine book into an exciting and distinguished evening in the theatre. Marshall, Nation, wasn't too happy about the over-simplification of the characters which made only the Claude Rains role fully rounded. She thought Walter J.Palance's playing of his important role as a small time gangster was out of place. In spite of this she recommended play for striking set by Frederick Fox. All praised craftsmanship of Rains and of supporting cast.

Angel in the Pawnshop-Booth, 1/18/51. George Jean Nathan lambasted Eddie Dowling's role as director and star in A.B.Shiffrin's whimsical comedy. He thinks it is about time that Dowling abandoned his latter day fondness for sentimentality and cash in both reputation and funds with something intelligent and reputable. Crisler, Christian Science Monitor, feared the elements of ersatz fantasy, Irish fairy tale whimsy and a 'cops and robbers' story didn't exactly blend.

Richard II-City Center, 1/24/51. Trade paper critics joined general salvos fired for Maurice Evans' swan song portrayal in the Shakespeare play. The actor has stated that this will be his last try at the part, because he feels a younger actor should portray it. Margaret Webster's production and most of the large supporting cast headed by Kent Smith were praised. Critics of Cue and Christian Science Monitor joined colleagues.

Second Threshold-Morosco, 1/2/51. Alfred de Liagre's production of Philip Barry's final play as revised by Robert E. Sherwood was panned by Clurman, New Republic, on several counts. The general premise is thin, the resolution feeble, Margaret Phillips is miscast, Clive Brook plays like he didn't want to scare the audience, and the direction is straight out of a Clyde Fitch stock company.

' Legit Stuff '

Shows that closed include King Lear, Sam Levene and Robert Alda, Guys and Dolls, subbed one night for YMCA Barry Gray...Time's Press Department features short profile of Claudie Cassidy, Chicago Tribune...Life with Father has earned 6000 per cent profit...NBC University of Air will be an hour long radio show featuring Margaret Webster as narrator and producer...Stage News trade paper combined with Tele-Talent.